

Margaret M Robertson

"Stephen Grattan's Faith"

Chapter One.

An Old Story.

Stephen Grattan had been a drunkard, and was now a reformed man. John Morely had been a drunkard, and was trying to reform. His father, though not a total abstainer, had lived and died a temperate man. But John Morely was not like his father. He had in him, the neighbours said, "the makings" of a better or a worse man than ever his father had been; and when, after his mother's death, the young builder brought home the pretty and good Alice Lambton as his wife, a "better man" they all declared he was to be; for they believed that now he would not be in danger from his one temptation. But as his business increased, his temptation increased. He was an intelligent man, and a good fellow besides; and his society was much sought after by men who were lovers of pleasure. Some of them were men who occupied a higher position than his; and, flattered by their notice, he yielded to the temptations which they placed before him.

He did not yield without a struggle. He sinned, and repented, and promised amendment often and often; but still he went away again, "like an ox to the slaughter; like a fool to the correction of the stocks."

Of course ruin and disgrace were the only ending to such a life as this. There was but one chance for him, they told his wife, who, through poverty, neglect, and shame, had still hoped against hope. If he could be made to break away from his old companions, if he could begin anew, and start fair in life again, he might retrieve the past.

It almost broke her heart to think of leaving their native land—of leaving behind all hope of ever seeing again her father or her mother, or the home among the hills where her happy girlhood had passed. But, for *his* sake, for the sake of the hope that gleamed in the future, she could do it. So, with their six little children, they removed from the States to Montreal in Canada, to begin again.

At first he struggled bravely with his temptation, though it everywhere met him; but, added to the old wretched craving for strong drink, was the misery of finding himself in a strange land without friends or a good name. If some kind hand had been held out to him at this time it might have been different with him. He might, with help, have stood firm against temptation. But, before work came, he had yielded to his old enemy; and his acknowledged skill as a workman availed him little, when, after days of absence, he would come to his work with a pallid face and trembling hands.

I have no heart to enter into the sad details of the family life at this time. It is enough to say that the miseries of Alice Morely's former home were renewed and deepened now. Here she was friendless. Here she could not fall back on the farm-house, as a home to some of her little ones "when the worst should come to the worst" with them. She struggled through some unhappy months, and then they moved again and came to Littleton, and there the same tale was told over again, with even more bitter emphasis, and then something happened.

It was something very terrible. Their child most tenderly cared for, the dearest one of all to his father's-heart,—a sickly little lad of seven,—was injured severely, fatally injured, in one of his fits of drunkenness. It was quite by accident. John would have given his own life gladly to save the little moaning creature; but the child never recovered. He died with his little wasted cheek laid close against his father's, and his arms clasped round his neck. There was not much said about it. No one but Stephen Grattan and his wife, who were very kind to them in their troubles, ever knew that any accident had happened to the child.

Things went better with them for a while. John got work, and took his family to a little log-house a mile or two from the village; and Alice began to hope that the better days so much longed for were coming now. But then came sickness, and then work failed, and—there was no help for it—the husband must go in search of it, that he might get bread for his starving family. So, with heavy hearts, they bade one another good-bye. The wife stayed with her children in the little log-house on the hill, while the husband went away alone.

He was very wretched. The thirst for strong drink, which he had begun to think was allayed, came upon him in all its strength, in the double misery of parting with his family, and going away knowing that he left his wife with more fear than hope in her heart with regard to him. How could she hope that he would

resist temptation,—he who had yielded to it so many times? Physically and morally he felt himself unfit for the battle that lay before him; and there was no one to help him—no one who cared to help him—he said bitterly to himself, as one after another passed by him without word or look.

It did not help him to know that the fault was altogether his own. It was all the worse to bear for that. He had had his chance in life, and lost it. What was the use of struggling for what could never be regained? If it were not for the wife and babies at home! And yet might it not be better even for them if they never were to see him more?

He had come down from his log-house on the hill with a few articles of wearing apparel made up into a bundle, had bought and paid for a cask of flour to be sent up to his family, and was now wandering about in a sad desponding state of mind when Stephen Grattan met him. Stephen spoke a few cheery words of comfort and courage to the poor broken-spirited fellow, begged him to be steadfast in his newly-begun purpose of reformation, and told him of the loving Saviour who would give him all needful help; who, if he looked to Him, would give him the grace of His Holy Spirit to enable him to overcome in the hour of temptation. Morely having thanked him heartily for his kindness, asked him to see that Smith at the provision shop sent up the flour to his wife next day, or the family would be in want of food. This Stephen readily promised to do, and added that he would look after them whilst he was away. The cheery words of his friend gave him a ray of hope and courage for a while.

But when Stephen left him at the corner of the street, it was with a heavy heart that he took his way to the hotel from which the stage was to start. The public room into which Morely stepped was large and lofty and brilliantly lighted. There were plenty of respectable people there at that moment. There was not the same temptation here as at the low tavern at which he had so often degraded himself below the level of the beast.

There was the bar, to be sure, with its shining array of decanters and glasses. But the respectable landlord, the gentlemanly bar-keeper, would never put the cup to his lips, or taunt him into treating others, for the sake of the "fool's pence," as Bigby, the low tavern-keeper, would have done. There were here no hidden corners where the night's debauch might be slept off, no secret chambers where deeds of iniquity might be planned and executed. No; it was a bright, clean, respectable house—altogether too respectable for such a shrinking,

shivering figure, in such shabby garments as his, Morely thought. And the landlord evidently thought so too; for when he had told him that the stage had not yet arrived, and that it was quite uncertain when it might come, he looked so much as if he expected him to go, that Morely took up his bundle and went without a word.

So Morely was turned out to wander up and down the street with his bundle in his hand; for he had nowhere else to go. It was not very cold, fortunately, he said to himself; but the snow was moist and penetrating, and his threadbare garments were but an insufficient protection against it. He went back once or twice within the hour to see if the stage had come. He watched at the door another hour, and then he was told that there had been an accident on the railway, and that if the stage came it would go no farther that night, so he had better not wait longer for it. But he did wait a little. He was chilled to the bone by this time, and he trembled and crouched over the fireplace, wondering vaguely what he should do next.

The landlord was a kind-hearted man. He could not but pity the shivering wretch. He stirred up the fire and set him a chair, and would gladly have given him a mug of hot drink to revive him, but he dared not. It would be like putting fire to a heap of flax, he knew. John Morely might be a madman or a frozen corpse to-morrow if he drank a single glass to-night. Let him taste it once, and his power of refraining was gone.

It was a pity, the landlord thought, and it made him uncomfortable for the moment; and in his discomfort he scolded and frowned, and walked about the room, till John Morely fancied he was the cause of it all, and again he took up his bundle to go.

Where was he to go? Utterly faint and weary and sick at heart, he asked himself the question as he took his way down the encumbered street. The snow was still falling heavily, and he toiled slowly and painfully through it. Where could he go? Should he try to get to the station on foot? It would be madness to think of it. He could never reach home through the storm. With cold and weariness and want of food, he was ready to faint. He could not even get home.

There were bright lights streaming from many a window along the village street; and no doubt there was warmth and plenty within. But there were no places open to him save those where the devil lay in wait for him; and he had not courage to face the devil then. He would be too much for him, weak and miserable

as he was; and, for Alice's sake and the children's, he must keep out of harm's way. He looked about for a sheltered place, where he might sit down and rest a little. He thought of Grattan, and struggled on to his gate; but they were either at meeting, or they had come home and gone to bed; for the house was dark. There were few lights along the village street now. The snow was deeper, and he stumbled on blindly, not knowing whither.

All at once a bright light flashed upon his dazzled eyes. It came from a low, wide door beyond the side-walk. He put out his hands blindly, feeling his way towards it, not daring to think where his wanderings had brought him, till mocking laughter startled him into the knowledge that he was once more at the mouth of that hell. He turned as though he would have fled; but he suffered himself to be drawn into the wretched tavern.

I cannot tell what happened there that night. Just what happens, I suppose, to many a poor lost wretch every night in the year, in the dark places hidden away in lanes and back streets of our cities and towns.

When Stephen Grattan went next morning to fulfil his promise to Morely he did not see Mr Smith; but the clerk told him it was all right—for he had himself helped to lift the barrel of flour onto the sled which was to take it away. No doubt it was all right.

He did not tell Stephen—perhaps he did not know—that the barrel of flour had been taken away by the tavern-keeper in payment for drink, and that there was no chance of its ever reaching the little log-house on the hill. Stephen would have liked to go up to the cottage; but the storm still continued. The snow lay deep and unbroken on the road, and it would have been a dangerous walk.

"Besides, I could not tell her truly that his courage was good—poor soul!—and without that I might as well stay at home." That worse news awaited them Stephen himself did not know as yet.

Chapter Two.

A Snow Storm.

Perched on a hill-top overlooking the village of Littleton, stood the humble log-house in which the Morelys had taken refuge. It

was on the other side of the river from the village, and was by the road full two miles distant. It had been a poor place when they took possession of it; and it was a poor place still—though Morely's skilful hands had greatly improved it.

In summer it was a very pleasant place. Behind it lay a wide stretch of sloping pasture-land, and the forest crowned the hill. It was not a very fertile spot, to be sure. It was full of hillocks and hollows, and there were great rocks scattered here and there through it, and places where the underwood had sprung up again after the first clearing. Later, when the November rains fell, and the wind blew through the hollows, it was dreary enough. It needed the sunshine to make it bright. But the hill screened it from the bitter north; and it was with a thankful heart that poor Alice Morely looked forward to a safe and sheltered winter for her children.

At the time when the merry boys and girls of Littleton were enjoying the last of the skating on the mill-pond, the little Morelys were watching the departure of their father for the distant city of Montreal. Their clothes looked scant and threadbare, and quite too thin for the season; but there was an air of cleanliness, and order about them which is rarely seen in connection with the poverty which comes of evil-doing. Only five gravely watched the retreating form of their father; the youngest—a babe of three months—lay in the cradle, and little Ben was in heaven.

There was something more than gravity in the mother's face as she stood watching also,—something more even than the sadness that would naturally follow the separation from her husband. It was an unchanging look—not of pain exactly, but as if the face could not easily be made to express any pleasing emotion, such as hope or joy. She was a brave little woman. She had dared much, and borne much, for her husband's sake; she had accepted the sorrowful necessities of her lot with a patient courage which could not have been predicted of one whose girlhood had been so carefully sheltered from evil. Through all her troubles she had been strong to endure, and never, even in the worst times, had she quite lost faith in her husband.

But as she saw him disappear round the turn of the hill, and then came out of the sunshine into the dimness of the deserted room, where her baby lay in his cradle, a sense of being utterly forsaken came over her, and for the moment she sank beneath it. The want to which her children might be soon exposed, the danger of temptation which she had so dreaded for her

husband, and the bitter feeling of utter friendlessness and loneliness, overcame her. She did not hear her baby cry, nor did she see her little daughter's look of wonder and terror, as, with bitter weeping, she cast herself down, calling aloud upon her father and her mother.

It was only for a moment. The child's terrified face recalled her to herself, and by a great effort she grew quiet again. Well might poor little Sophy look on with wonder and terror. She had seen many sorrowful sights, but never, even when they left their old home, or when little Ben died, had her mother given way like this. "What is the matter, mother? Are you ill? Speak to me, mother."

But her mother had no power to speak; she could only lay herself down by her wailing baby, quite exhausted. Sophy took up the child, and cared for it and soothed it. She shut the door, to keep her brothers out of the room, and in a little while she said again—

"What is it, mother? Can I do anything?"

"Yes, love; you must do all for me and your brothers. I am quite unfitted for anything to-night. If I can keep quiet, I shall be better to-morrow. Give me baby, and keep the boys out a little while. Oh! I must get strong again!"

The house was quiet enough; the boys needed no bidding to stay out among the falling snow; and Sophy, having covered the window, that her mother might sleep, crept in behind the curtain to watch the snow-flakes.

Before it grew dark the earth was white as far as the eye could see; the snow fell all night too, and when Sophy opened the door in the morning, it lay on the threshold as high as her waist. In the single glimpse of sunshine that flashed forth, how dazzling the earth looked! The fields around, the valleys beneath, the river, the pond, and the hills beyond, all were white.

"How beautiful!" she repeated many times. It was a little troublesome, too, she was willing to acknowledge by the time she had gone backward and forward through it to the spring for water, and to the wood-pile for wood, to last through the day. It was neither pleasant nor easy to do all that she had to do in the snow that morning; but little Sophy had a cheerful heart and a willing mind, and came in rosy and laughing, though a little breathless when all was done. She needed all her courage and

cheerfulness, for her mother was quite unable to rise; and whatever was to be done either in the house or out of it, must be done by her to-day.

"I am afraid the storm may prevent the coming of the things your father was to get for us," said her mother; "and, Sophy dear, you must make the best of the little we have till I am strong again."

"Oh, mother, never fear; there's plenty," said the cheerful little Sophy. "There's some meal and flour, and some tea and bread, and—that's all," she added, coming to a sudden stop. She had not been accustomed of late to a very well-stored pantry, yet even with her limited idea of abundance she was a little startled at the scantiness of the supply.

"There's no use in vexing mother, though," said she to herself; "if the things don't come to-day, they will be sure to come to-morrow. There's enough till then if we take care."

It snowed all the morning, but it cleared up a little in the afternoon; that is, there was every now and then a glimpse of sunshine as the hurrying clouds failed to overtake each other in the changing sky. Now and then, before it grew dark, down the shallow ravine where the road lay there came driving clouds of snow—tokens of the mountainous drifts that were to pile themselves up there before the storm should be over.

How the wind raved round the little house all night, threatening, as it seemed to Alice Morely, to tear it down and scatter its fragments far and wide! The first sight the weary little Sophy saw in the morning was her mother's pale, anxious face looking down upon her.

"How you sleep, child! I have been awake all night, expecting every moment that we should be blown away. It does not seem possible that the house can stand against this dreadful wind much longer."

"It is much stronger now than when we came, mother dear," said Sophy; "it must have fallen long ago if the wind could blow it down. Go to bed again, mother, and I will bring your tea and take baby, and you shall rest."

Mrs Morely had no choice but to lay down again. She was trembling with cold and nervous excitement, quite unable to sit up; and again Sophy was left to the guidance of their affairs, both within and without the house. This was a less easy matter

to-day, for the boys were growing weary of being confined to the house, and the little ones were fretful, and it needed all their sister's skill and patience to keep them amused and happy.

She did her very best. The daily reading of the Testament was lengthened out by questions and little stories, and then they sang the sweet Sabbath-school hymns, which tell the praises of Him who came to save sinners; and who in the greatness of His love died on the cross, that all who believe in Him might have everlasting life. So she kept them quiet while the weary mother sought a little rest: and thus the day wore on.

But all through the reading and the singing and the talk, a vague fear kept crossing the little girl's mind. What if the things so confidently expected from the village should not come? Their little store of food was diminishing rapidly. What if their father had forgotten them? What if there was nothing awaiting them in the village? Oh, that was too dreadful to be thought of! But if there was food in the village for them, how was it to be brought to them through the drifted snow?

She eagerly watched the window for some sign that the storm was abating. The snow that had seemed so beautiful at first filled her with a vague fear now; it no longer fell softly and silently; the wind bore it by in whirling masses, that hid the river and the pond and the changing sky, and then laid it down in the valleys and on the hill-sides, to lie there, Sophy knew, till April showers and sunshine should come to melt it away. It was vain to look for any one coming with the expected food. Except now and then in a momentary lull of the storm it was quite impossible to see a rod beyond the window, and these glimpses only served to show that they were, on one side at least, quite shut in by a mountainous drift.

Yes, Sophy began to be quite afraid of the snow; tales that she had heard during her summer visits to the mountains came to her mind—how in a single night the valleys would be filled, and how whole flocks of sheep, and sometimes an unwary shepherd, had perished beneath it. She remembered how her grandfather had showed her a cottage where a mother and her children had been quite shut in for two nights and a day, till the neighbours had come to dig them out; and how a lad who had gone out for help before the storm was over had never come home again, but perished on the moor, and how they only found him in the spring time, when the snow melted and showed his dead face turned towards the sky. These things quite appalled her when she thought of venturing out in the storm.

The little store of meal held out wonderfully; the bread was put aside for her mother—hidden, indeed, that no little brother, hungry and adventurous, might find it. That night the storm abated, but towards morning it grew bitterly cold, so cold that the little lads in their thin garments could not venture out to play at making roads in the snow, and they had to submit to another day's confinement. They went out a little towards afternoon, and came in again merry and hungry, and by no means satisfied with the scanty supper which their sister had prepared for them.

Chapter Three.

Home Trials.

We could never tell you all that the poor mother suffered as she lay there day after day helpless among her children. Her own illness and helplessness was the last drop, which made her cup overflow. Gradually, as she lay there listening to the roaring of the storm, it became clear, to her how little she had come to trust to her husband's promises of reformation. It was to her own efforts she must trust for the support of herself and her children; her faith in him quite failed after so many hopes and disappointments; and now what was to become of them all?

She was angry and bitter against herself, poor woman, because her hope of better days had quite perished. She called herself faithless, and said to herself that she did not deserve that it should go well with her husband, since she had ceased to believe in him and trust him; but, sick in body and sick at heart, she had no power, for the time at least, to rally. She prayed in her misery often and long, but it was to a God who seemed far away—a God who had apparently hidden His face from her.

The third day was drawing to a close. Sophy gathered the children to their daily reading near their mother's bed, and, with great pains and patience, found and kept the place for them. John was ten, and a good reader—quite equal to Sophy herself, he thought; but Ned and little Will were only just beginning to be able to read with the rest, and their sister took all the pains in the world to improve them and to make them really care for the reading; and almost always, this hour was a very pleasant time. The lesson to-day was the fifth of Mark.

"Now, boys, you must attend carefully," said Sophy, when they were seated; "because there are many wonderful things in the chapter. I read it last night by the firelight after you were all in bed; and I want each of you to tell me which part you think most wonderful. You must begin, Will, and then Ned; and then I'll read your verses over after you, so that you may understand them."

For the two little lads could make but little of anything they read themselves as yet, though they listened with pleasure to the reading of their sister. And, besides, the double reading would help to pass the time and make her brothers contented in the house.

Mrs Morely was beguiled from the indulgence of her own sad thoughts, first as she watched the little girl's grave, motherly ways with her brothers, and then by listening to the words they were reading. First, there was the story of the man who had his dwelling in the tombs. They read on slowly and gravely, Sophy reading each verse again, except when it was John's turn, till they came to the eighth, "For He said unto him, Come out of the man, thou unclean spirit."

"And of course he came out of him," exclaimed Sophy. "For Jesus can do anything—yes, anything. Think of the most difficult thing in the world—Jesus could do it, as easy as I can do this." And she stooped and touched her lips to little Will's brow. The children paused to think about it, and so did the mother.

"Come out of him, thou unclean spirit."

Was it true? Had the unclean spirit obeyed the voice of Jesus then, and was that voice less powerful now? Surely not. To her He seemed far away, and yet He was near. It came upon her, as it had never come before, how if ever her husband was saved it must be through God's power and grace. If ever her husband was to be saved from the love of strong drink, it must be through a Divine power that should cleanse him and keep him and dwell in him for ever. Even the power of the Holy Ghost, which could convert his heart, and make him "a new creature in Christ Jesus."

"Sitting, and clothed, and in his right mind," spelt out little Will, slowly; and Sophy repeated, "clothed, and in his right mind."

The mother's soul went up in an agony of prayer for her husband, that he might be saved from suffering and shame, and be found "in his right mind," "sitting at the feet of Jesus."

"Surely He can do it! Surely He will do it! Oh, if I were not so faithless—so unworthy!"

Still the reading went on, and she listened to the twenty-eighth verse: "For she said, If I may touch but His clothes, I shall be whole."

"Lord, give me that poor woman's faith, that I may trust and be blessed as she was," she entreated, covering her face, that her children might not wonder at seeing her so moved. She seemed to see the Saviour now. She cast herself at His feet, "fearing and trembling." Surely He would say to her, as to that other, "Go in peace!"

And still they read on, how Jesus went to the ruler's house, and how, having put the unbelieving people out, He took the maiden's hand, and cried, "I say unto thee, Arise. And straightway the damsel arose."

"Of course she arose," said Sophy. "It made no matter that she was dead; because, you know, it was Jesus who said it. Think of all these wonderful things!"

"Wonderful indeed! Oh, for faith! Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief!" prayed the poor mother—her face still covered. Sophy thought she slept, and sent her little brothers out for a while, cold as it was, that she might be quiet; and then she went about the house, softly doing what was to be done. In a little while she brought in her mother's cup of tea; and, as the light fell on her face, she said, cheerfully, "Your sleep must have done you good, mother. You look better."

"Something has done me good, I think, love," said her mother, kissing the little girl's upturned face. "You are looking pale and weary. I hope I shall soon be well now."

"I hope so, mother,—not that I am tired; but it will be good to see you up again."

Still it grew more bitterly cold. The nails and the boards of the old house cracked so often, and with such violence, that the children grew terrified lest it should fall upon them.

As for Sophy, the thought that she ought to brave the bitter cold and all those mountainous drifts, never left her for a moment. She had been hoping all along that the expected food night come. But the fear of actual want was now drawing nearer

every moment; and soon, she knew, she would have no choice but to go.

That night she divided into two parts the small quantity of meal that remained. One part she put aside for the morning, and of the other she made for her brothers' supper some thin gruel, instead of their usual hearty porridge. The hungry little lads eyed with undisguised discontent the not very savoury mess; but, fortunately, the table was laid in the corner of the room most distant from their mother's bed, and their murmurs were unheard by her.

"Now, boys, I have something to say to you," began Sophy, gravely. "There is not much supper; but you must be content with it. We shall be sure to have something more to-morrow. If the things don't come to-night, I shall go myself to the village to-morrow, to see what has become of them. At any rate, we must not fret mother about it. It will be all right to-morrow, you may be sure."

She made quite merry over little Will's fears that the things might never come, and that they all might starve, as sometimes children did in books. She laughed at him, and made him laugh at himself. But, though Sophy spoke hopefully to her brothers, she had her own troubled thoughts to struggle with still. That was a long, long night to her, and to her mother too. Though Mrs Morely did not know how nearly they were at the end of their stores, she knew they could not last long; and the thought would come back, What if there was nothing awaiting them in the village? What if her husband had fallen again? She could not hope for immediate help from him, even if he were to hold firm after his arrival in Montreal and get immediate employment. How were the next few weeks to be got through? She thought and planned, till she grew weary and discouraged; but she never quite let go of the hope that had come to her through the children's reading in the afternoon. He who had cast out devils, He who had raised the dead, could He not also save her husband? He who had been merciful to the poor woman who trusted in Him, would He not be merciful to her? Was not His love unchanged, and were not His promises the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever? She clung to the thoughts of the wonderful works of Jesus, going over and over them in her mind, turning the poor woman's words into prayer to suit her own case; and so the night wore away.

Sophy slept now and then; but she might just as well have kept awake, for in her dreams she fancied she was lost in the snow, and that she was struggling on through it with the baby in her

arms. The night seemed as long as a whole winter to her, she told her mother afterwards; but it came to an end at last.

The first thing that Mrs Morely saw, on waking from a momentary slumber, was her little daughter taking a coverlet from the bed to fasten it over the low window. She must have fallen asleep again; for the next thing she saw was Sophy standing by her bed, with a cup of tea and a bit of toast in her hand. There was a small, bright fire on the hearth; but there was no other light in the room. It seemed early to her; but the children were all awake, and clamouring to be allowed to rise, notwithstanding their sister's entreaties that they would lie still till the room was warm. But little Harry was cold and hungry, and would not be persuaded; and at last he made a rush towards his mother's bed. In passing the window he caught hold of the coverlet that hung over it; and down it fell, and the bright sunlight streamed in. A cry of surprise, which soon changed to indignation, burst from the children.

"Mother," exclaimed Sophy, entreatingly, "I did it to keep out the cold, and to make the day seem shorter."

"But, dreary as the days are, surely the nights are drearier," said her mother, wonderingly.

"Yes, mother; I know—but—" She paused. What could she say, but that she wished to keep the children asleep, because there was so little to give them when they awoke? She saw from her mother's face that she understood her reason, and she hastened to say, "I must go to the village, mother. It is no use waiting any longer. I ought to have gone yesterday. They have forgotten to send the things—or my father has forgotten to get them," she added to herself, with a sense of pain and shame.

"I ought to have gone yesterday, mother," repeated Sophy, "but I was afraid of losing my way in the snow. I was foolish, I know, but I could not help thinking of the little lad you told us about once, who never came back."

"We must do something," said her mother; "and I am afraid it would be impossible for me to go to the village myself. Surely the road must be opened by this time. Is it still as cold, do you think? You must take John with you. Two are better than one."

"No; it is not so cold, I think," said Sophy. "And, dear mother, you are not to fret. We can go easily, and it will all come right, you'll see." And Sophy made a great pretence of hastening the

dressing of her little brothers, that she might get their breakfast first and then hurry away.

Chapter Four.

Help in the Hour of Need.

The breakfast was prepared and eaten, such as it was. Sophy made all things neat, and kept the baby while her mother dressed herself, and then she prepared for her walk to the village. But she was not to struggle through the snow that day. Just as she was bidding her good-bye, they were startled by the sound of voices quite near, and the boys rushed out in time to see a yoke of oxen plunging through the drift that rose like a wall before the door. The voice of Stephen Grattan fell like music on their ears. The things were come at last, and plenty of them. There were bags and bundles manifold, and a great round basket of Dolly Grattan's, well known to the little Morelys as capable of holding a great many good things, for it had been in their house before.

"I don't know as you would speak to me, if you knew all, mother," said Stephen at last, approaching Mrs Morely, who was sitting by the fire with her baby in her arms. "You are all alive, I see,—at least the boys are. How is baby, and my little Sophy? Why, what ails the child?"

He might well ask; for Sophy was lying limp and white across the baby's cot. Poor little Sophy! The reaction from those terrible fears—the doubt that her father had forgotten them, and the fear of what might become of them all—was too much for her, weakened as she was by anxiety and want of food. She had borne her burden well, but her strength failed her when it was lifted off. It was only for a moment. As Stephen lifted her on the bed, she opened her eyes, and smiled.

"Mother, dear, it is nothing,—only I'm so glad." Her eyes closed again wearily.

"That ain't just the way my folks show how glad they be," said Stephen, as she turned her face on her pillow to hide her happy tears.

"She's hungry," said Ned, gravely. "There wasn't much; and she didn't eat any dinner yesterday—nor much supper."

"Now I know you'll have nothing to say to me," said Stephen. "These things—the most of them, at least—might have been here, as well as not, the night your husband went away, if I had done my duty, as I promised."

"Thank God!" she murmured as she grasped Stephen's hand. "He did not forget us. The rest is as nothing."

"And," continued Stephen with a face which ought to have been radiant, but which was very far from that, "the very last word he said to me that night, when I bade him good-bye, was, 'I'll hold on to the end.'"

And, having said this, Stephen seemed to have nothing more to say. He betook himself to the preparation of dinner with a zeal and skill that put all Sophy's attempts to help him quite out of the question. How the dinner was enjoyed need not be told. Breakfast the boys called it, in scornful remembrance of the gruel. There were very bright faces round the table. The only face that had a shadow on it was Stephen's; and that only came when he thought no one was looking at him. He was in a great hurry to get away, too, it seemed.

"For the roads are awful; and you may be thankful, little Sophy, that you hadn't to go to Littleton to-night. I started to bring the things on a hand-sled, but would never have got through the drifts if it hadn't a' been for Farmer Jackson and his oxen. Don't you try it yet a while. I'll be along again with Dolly one of these days."

Stephen Grattan's face might have been brighter, as he turned to nod to the group of happy children watching his departure at the door of the log cottage. The "good-byes" and the "come agains" sent after him did make him smile a little, but only for a moment. The shadow fell darker and darker on his face, as he made his way through the scarcely-open road in the direction of the village. For Stephen's heart was very heavy, and with good cause. Sad as had been his first sight of the sorrowful mother and her children, he had seen a sadder sight that day. In the dim grey of the bitter morning he had caught a glimpse of a crouching, squalid figure hurrying with uncertain yet eager steps—whither? His heart stood still as he asked himself the question, "To the foot-bridge over Deering Brook? To the gaping hole beyond?"

Stephen Grattan had not what is called "a rapid mind." He was not bold to dare, nor strong to do. But in the single minute that passed before he found himself on Deering Bridge he realised all

the miserable circumstances of Morely's fall, balanced the chances of life and death for the poor wretch, and took his own life in his hand for his sake. He knew that one more wicked deed had been added to the tavern-keeper's catalogue of sins,—that the children's bread had been stolen, and the father brutalised and then cast forth in the bitter cold, to live or die, it mattered little which.

"To live, it must be," said Stephen; "at least for repentance—perhaps for a better life. He must be saved. But how?"

Stephen could have touched him with his hand as he asked the question. Could he win him by persuasion and gentle words, or must he master him by force, and save him from the death on which he was rushing? Must he wrestle with the madman's temporary strength?—perhaps yield to it, and share his fate?

If these two men knew just what happened, when, by a sudden movement of Stephen, they were brought face to face, they never spoke of it, even to each other. Dolly's brief "Thank God!" as she opened the door to let them in, was like heavenly music to Stephen's ear, he told her afterwards; but never, even to Dolly, would he go beyond the opening of the door in speaking of that day.

After three terrible hours, Stephen left Morely in a troubled sleep, and set out for the log-house on the hill with the help so much needed. All the way there he had been going over the question in his mind whether or not he should tell Mrs Morely of her husband's situation. His first thought had been that she must not know it; but, seeing Morely as he had seen him for the last few hours, he feared to take upon himself the responsibility of concealment. Should his troubled sleep grow calm and continue, a few days' rest and care would suffice to place him where he was when he left home; but, otherwise, none could tell what the end might be. Weakened by illness, by want of food, and by his late excess, Stephen well knew the chances were against his recovery; and ought not his wife to be made aware of his situation? The first glance at Mrs Morely's pale face decided him. She must not know of this new misery that had befallen her husband, at least not now.

So it was no wonder that Stephen turned towards home with a sad face and a heavy heart, knowing all this. He had not been so downcast for a long time. It broke his heart to think of poor Morely. Even the misery and destitution that seemed to lie before the poor wife and children were nothing to this; and, as he dragged himself through the heavy snow, panting and

breathless, he was praying, as even good men cannot always pray, with an urgency that would take no denial, that this poor soul might have space for repentance,—that he might not be suffered to go down into endless death. He did not use many words. "Save him, Lord, for Thy Name's sake—for Thine own Name's sake, Lord!" These were nearly all. But his hand was on the hem of the Lord's garment. Hundreds of times the cry arose. Sometimes he spoke aloud in his agony, never knowing it, never seeing the wondering looks that followed him over the bridge and up the street to his own door.

"Well, Dolly!" he said, faintly, going in.

Dolly was never a woman of many words; she nodded her head towards the closed door and said, "A leetle quieter, if anything."

"Thank God!" said Stephen, and the tears ran down his brown old face with a rush that he could not restrain. Dolly did not try to comfort him. She did better than that; she took from the stove a vessel containing soup, and having poured some into a basin and broken some bread into it, she set it before him, saying, "It's no wonder you feel miserable. Eat this."

"Can I, do you suppose?" said Stephen.

"You've got to!" said Dolly, taking such an attitude as a hen-sparrow might be supposed to assume should she see fit to threaten a barn-yard fowl. And he did eat it, every drop.

"I feel better," he said, with a grateful sigh.

"I expect so," said Dolly, briefly, as she removed the basin. It was Mrs Grattan's acknowledged "object in life," her recognised "mission," to provide her husband with "something good to eat." In the old days, when Stephen's reformation was new, she had many a time satisfied herself with a crust, that he might have food to strengthen him to resist the old fierce craving for stimulants, and thus doing, she helped, more than she knew, God's work of grace in him.

"Did you tell the poor creetur?" she asked.

Stephen shook his head, and told her of poor Mrs Morely's illness, and of all that had been happening at the little log-house during the days of the storm. "It seemed as though it was more than she could bear to hear: so I told her what he said to me the other night, and nothing at all of to-day."

They were both silent for a while, thinking. It was a great responsibility for them to take thus to conceal Morely's situation from his wife, for it might be that he was in real danger. But it was not of this they were thinking. Even if he were not in danger—if, after a few days' nursing, they were able to send him to Montreal as though nothing had happened—their troubles would not be at an end.

For they were very poor people. By the utmost economy they had been able, during the last five years, to buy and pay for the little house in which they lived; but they had nothing laid up for the future; and now that Littleton was growing to be a place of some importance, as the new railway was nearly completed to it, there were new shops of all kinds to be opened in it, and Stephen's business would be interfered with; for he could not make good boots and shoes as cheaply as other people could buy and sell poor ones, and his custom was dropping off. It would all come right in the end, he told Dolly; but in the meantime a hard winter might lie before them.

Chapter Five.

Working and Waiting.

So, as they sat there in silence, Dolly was thinking with some anxiety that they were making themselves responsible for all the food needed in the little log-house for the next two months at least, and Stephen was thinking the same. Dolly could see no possible way of doing this without putting themselves in debt, and there were few things that Dolly dreaded more. Stephen saw his way clear without the debt, but it was a way almost as much to be regretted as the running up of a long bill at Smith's would be. The little sum that he had collected with much effort, and kept with much self-denial, which was to purchase a supply of leather at the cheapest market in Montreal, must be appropriated to another purpose, for nothing but ready money would do now. Morely's expenses must be paid to Montreal, and, indeed, in Montreal till he could get employment; and the children must in the meantime be cared for as well; and therefore Stephen's leather must be purchased piece by piece as before; and how could he ever compete with the cheap shoe-shops that had taken away some of his customers already? His face took an anxious look, and so did Dolly's, till she caught sight of the wrinkles on her husband's forehead, and then she thought best to brighten up immediately.

"It ain't best to worry about it," said she.

"No, worry never helped nobody yet." said Stephen; but his face did not change.

"And there's nothing we can do about it, to-day, but wait," continued his wife.

"Nothing but wait—and pray," said Stephen, quietly.

"If you could go to work now, you'd feel a sight better; but the noise—" and her voice sank into a whisper.

"Yes; I promised young Clement that I should have little Teddy Lane's boots ready for him to-night," said Stephen. "It's too late now, I'm afraid; you'll have to keep all the doors shut for the noise," he added, going; and then he turned back to say in a whisper:

"I wish I could have that Bigby in my hands for just two minutes? Eh, Dolly?"

Dolly shook her head.

"You might do him good," said she, gravely. "But then, again, you might not."

It never came into these people's minds that they could shirk this care that had fallen on them. To keep Morely's fall a secret would save his wife from terrible grief and pain, and would give the poor broken man a better chance to retrieve the past; and kept from her it must be, at whatever cost and trouble to them.

"For don't I remember how worse than death to me was my old man's falling back after my hopes were raised? The poor creetur shan't have this to bear, if I can help it," said Dolly to herself, as she went to Morely's door.

"And don't I remember the hole of the pit from which I was drawn time and again by God's mercy?" said Stephen, as he sat down on his bench. "I'll do what I can; and when I can't do no more, then the Lord will put His hand to it Himself, I expect."

It would not be well to enter the wretched man's room, or lift the curtain which hid from all but these kind people the next few miserable days. It was enough to say that, at their close, John Morely, weak as a child in mind and body, found himself with the old battle before him again. If he could have had his

choice, he would have had it all end there. There was nothing but shame in looking backward—nothing but fear in looking forward. He was helpless and hopeless. Why had Stephen Grattan troubled himself to save him from deeper sin and longer misery? There was no help for him, he thought, in his utter despondency.

As for Stephen, if his faith did not hold out for his friend now, no one would have guessed it from his prayers, or from his words of encouragement to Morely. According to him, it was the helpless and hopeless sort that the Lord came to save. He had done it before; He could do it again; and He would do it.

"I've been a sight deeper down in this pit than ever you've been yet. But, down or up, it's all the same to Him that's got the pulling of you out. There's no up nor down, nor far nor near, to Him. 'O ye of little faith, wherefore do ye doubt?' He's a-saying this to you now; and He's a-saying, too, 'This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting.' But *He* drove that kind out by a word, just as He drove all the rest. Hang onto His own word, John. He's said, time and again, that He'll save the man that trusts in Him; and don't you let go of that. You've been trying to be sober, and to get back your good name, for the wife's sake and the babies. You would give all the world to know again how it feels to be a free man. Just you give all that up. Seek to be the Lord's. His grace is all-sufficient. His strength will be made perfect in your weakness. If you're His, He'll keep you, and no mistake. Give all the rest up, and hang on to the Lord in simple faith. You can never do this thing of yourself; but the Lord'll give you the help of His grace, if you ask Him. I *know*, because I've tried Him."

Whatever was said, it always ended thus: "You can do nothing of yourself; but with the Lord's help you can do all things. Hold fast to Him. Let your cry be, 'Lord Jesus, save, or I perish.'"

Poor Morely listened, and tried to hope. If ever he was saved from the power of his foe, the Lord must surely do it, he felt, for he could do nothing; and, in a blind, weak way, he did strive to put his trust in God.

When the time came that he was well enough to go away, Stephen would fain have gone with him, to encourage him and stand by him till he could get something to do. But this could not be. They lived by his daily labour, and his business had been neglected of late, through his care for his friend; and he could only write to a friend of his, praying him to interest himself in Morely's behalf.

His letter, written out word for word, just as he sent it, would very likely excite laughter. But it answered the end for which it was sent. It awoke in another true heart sympathy for the poor desponding Morely; it strengthened another kind hand to labour in his behalf. So he did not find himself homeless and friendless in the streets of a great city, as he had been before. In Montreal a welcome awaited him, and a home; and something like hope once more sprang up in Morely's heart, as he heard his new friend's cheerful words and responded to the warm grasp of his hand.

Stephen and his wife saw hard times after Morely went away. And yet not so very hard, either, seeing they were endured for a friend. They never said to each other that the times were hard.

There were no more suppers or breakfasts of thin gruel at the little log-house on the hill. In a few days after his first memorable visit, Stephen Grattan was there again, and again Farmer Jackson's oxen called forth the wonder and admiration of the little Morelys. For Stephen, as he took great pains to explain to Mrs Morely, had taken advantage of the opportunity afforded by the return of the farmer's empty sled, to bring up the barrel of flour and the bag of meal that ought to have been sent up the very night her husband went away. There were fish, too, and meat, and some other things, and a piece of spare-rib, which, Stephen acknowledged, his Dolly had been saving for some good purpose all through the winter.

And Stephen brought something for which Mrs Morely was more grateful than even for the spare-rib. He brought an offer of needle-work from a lady in the town who had many little children. The lady, it seemed, had a strange prejudice against sewing-machines, and in favour of skilful fingers, for the doing of fine white work. This did much to restore the mother's health and peace of mind; and a letter that came from her husband about this time did more. Not that it was a very hopeful letter. He said little, except that he had got work, and that he hoped soon to be able to send much more than the trifle he enclosed. But, though he did not say in words that he had withstood all temptation, yet at the very end he said, "Pray for me, Alice, that I may be strong to stand." And her heart leaped with joy, as she said to herself, "He did not need to ask me to do that." And yet she was really more glad to be asked that than for all the letter and the enclosure besides.

Chapter Six.

A Life History.

And so the winter wore away. January, February, March, passed; and when April came in there were only here and there, on the hillocks, bits of bare ground to tell that the spring was coming.

"And to think that all my father's fields are sown and growing green by this time—and the violets and the primroses out in all the dales!" said Mrs Morely, with a sudden rush of homesick tears.

Mrs Grattan was with her, paying a long day's visit; for they had been all the morning talking cheerfully of many things.

"Our winter is long," she said.

"Oh, so long and dreary!" sighed Mrs Morely. "No, you must not think me discontented and unthankful," she added, meeting Mrs Grattan's grave looks. "Only a little homesick now and then. If I were sure that all was well with—" She hesitated.

"I will trust, and not be afraid," said Mrs Grattan, softly.

They had not spoken much to one another about their troubles,—these two women. Mrs Morely's reserve, even at the time of little Ben's death, had never given way so far as to permit her to speak of her husband's faults and her own trials. And Mrs Grattan's sympathy, though deep, had been silent—expressed by deeds rather than by words. She knew well how full of fear for her husband the poor wife's heart had been all the winter; but she could not approach the subject until she herself introduced it.

"I will trust, and not be afraid," said Mrs Morely, repeating her friend's words. "I can do naught else; and not always that."

"Lord, increase our faith!" murmured Dolly.

There was a pause, during which Mrs Morely went about, busy with some household matter. When she sat down again, she said:

"You must not think I am pining for home. If I were sure that it is well with my husband, nothing else would matter."

"You have good hope that it is well with him," said Mrs Grattan.

"Oh, I do not know. I cannot tell. I can only leave him in God's hand." But she did not speak very hopefully.

"And surely there's no better thing to do for him than that," said Mrs Grattan.

"I know it. But I have hoped so many times, and so few of the poor souls who have gone so far astray as he has done come back to a better life. I fear no more than I hope."

There was a long pause after that, and then, in a voice that seemed quite changed, Mrs Grattan said, "I never told you about Stephen and me, did I?"

"No. I know that you have had some great trouble in your life, like mine—indeed, your husband has told me that: that is all I know."

"Well, it's not to be spoken of often. But, just to show what the Lord can do when He sets out to save a poor creature to the uttermost, I will tell you what He has done for Stephen and me. It must be told in few words, though. It shakes me to go back to those days.

"We were born in Vermont—as good a State as any to be born and brought up in. It was quite a country place we lived in. My father was a farmer—a grave, quiet man. My mother was never very strong; and I was the only one spared to them of five children. We lived a very quiet, humble sort of life; but, if ever folks lived contented and happy, we did.

"Stephen was one of many children—too many for them all to get a living on their little stony farm; and his father sent his boys off as soon as they were able to go, and Stephen, who was the second son, was sent to learn the shoemaker's trade in Weston, about twenty miles away.

"We had kept company, Stephen and me—as boys and girls will, you know—before he went; and it went on all the time he was learning his trade, whenever he came home on a visit. When his time was out, he stayed on as a journeyman in the same place; but he fell into bad hands, I suppose, for it began to come out through the neighbours, who saw him there sometimes, that he wasn't doing as he ought to do; and when my father heard from them that they had seen him more than once the worse for liquor, he would let him have nothing more to say to me.

"You will scarcely understand just how it seemed to our folks. There was hardly a man who tasted liquor in all our town in those days. To have been betrayed into taking too much just once would have been to lose one's character; and when my father heard of Stephen's being seen a good many times when he was not able to take care of himself, it seemed to him that it was a desperate case. I think he would as lief have laid me down in the graveyard beside my little brothers, as have thought of giving me to Stephen then.

"I didn't know how much I thought of him till there was an end put to his coming to our house. I believe I grew to care more about him when other folks turned against him. Not that I ever thought hard of my father: I knew he was right, and I didn't mean to let him see that I was worrying; but he did see it, and when Stephen came home and worked, sometimes at his trade and sometimes on his father's farm, a year quite steady, he felt every day more and more like giving it up, and taking him into favour again. He never said so, but I am sure my mother thought so, and sometimes I did too.

"My mother died that fall, and we had a dreadful still, lonesome winter—my father and me; and when after a while Stephen came to see me, as he used to do, my father didn't seem to mind. And pretty soon Stephen took courage and asked the old man for me. He said that I would be the saving of him, and that we would always stay with him in his old age—which came on him fast after my mother died. So, what with one thing and what with another, he was wrought on to consent to our marriage: but I do believe it was the thought of helping to save a soul from death, that did more than all the rest to bring him round.

"Things went well with us for a while—for more than two years—nearly three; but then one day Stephen went to Weston, and got into trouble; and the worst was, having begun, he couldn't stop. It was a miserable time. My father lost faith in Stephen after that, and Stephen lost faith in himself, and he got restless and uneasy, and it was a dreadful cross to him to have to stay at father's, knowing that he wasn't trusted and depended on as he used to be. And I suppose it was a cross to father to have him there; for when I spoke of going away, though he said it would break his heart to part from me, his only child, he said, too, that it would not do to part husband and wife, and perhaps it would be better to try it, for a while at least. So we went to live in Weston, and Stephen worked at his trade.

"Then father married again. He was an old man, and it never would have happened if I could have stayed with him. But what could he do? He couldn't stay alone. The woman he married was a widow with children, and I knew there never would be room for me at home any more.

"We had a sad time at Weston. I had always lived on a farm, and, though Weston wasn't much of a place then, it seemed dreadful close and shut-up and dismal to me. I was homesick and miserable there, and maybe I didn't do all I might have done to make things pleasant for Stephen, and help to keep him straight. It was a dreadful time for him, and for me too.

"Well, after a while our children were born—twin boys. Stephen was always tender-hearted over all little children; and over his own—I couldn't tell you what he was. It did seem then as though, if he could get a fair start and begin again, he might do better, for his children's sake. So, when I got well, I made up my mind that I would ask a little help from father, and we'd go west.

"I knew I never could go home to stay now. But, when I saw the old place for the last time, I thought my heart would break. It wasn't much of a place. There were only a few stony fields of pasture-land, and a few narrow meadows; but, oh, I thought, if my babies had only been born when we were in that safe, quiet place, it might have been so different! And my father was so feeble and old, and helpless-like, I could not bear to think of going so far away that I could never hope to see him again.

"But there was no help for it. It would give Stephen another chance; and so, with the little help my father could give us, we went out west and settled.

"So we left the old life quite behind, and began again. We had a hard time, but no harder than people generally have who go to a new country. Stephen kept up good courage, and stuck to his work; and I helped him all I could; and if I was sometimes a little discouraged and homesick, he never guessed it. And I never was much of either; for I was busy always, and there was my babies—" Dolly's voice broke into a shrill wail as she spoke the word, and she sat with her face hidden a little while before she could go on again.

Chapter Seven.

Waiting for News.

"Well, the time went by till our children were two years old—not, to be sure, without some trouble, but still we got along, and I was never without the hope that better days were coming. About that time we got some new neighbours; but it was a dark day for us,—the day that Sam Healy came and took a place near us. They were kind folks enough, and I don't think the man began by wishing to do my Stephen harm. He could drink and stop when he wanted to—at least, so he said; but Stephen couldn't, and I was never sure of him after the Healys came.

"They came in the fall and a dreary winter followed their coming; but when spring opened things began to mend with us. I did what I could to help Stephen, and kept by him in the field. There wasn't much to do within doors. There was only one room in the house, and a bed and table and a bench or two was all the furniture we had; but we might have been well and happy there till now, if we had been let alone.

"So, having but little to do in the house, as I said, I helped what I could in the field. I used to take my boys out and let them play about on the warm ground while I planted or hoed; and in this way I got Stephen home many a time when he would have gone over to Healy's, or some of the neighbours, if it hadn't been for carrying the babies home. Not that they needed carrying, for they were strong, hearty lads; but they were fond of their father, and a ride on his shoulders was their great pleasure. And he was always good to them when he was himself; and I kept them out of the way as much as I could at other times.

"We got along somehow, on into the summer. Healy's wife was a kind woman enough, but she had been brought up different to me; and it worried me so to have Stephen hanging round there that I hadn't much to say to her any way. I suppose this vexed her, for she was lonesome, and didn't know what to do with herself; and I used to think she put her husband up to being more friendly with Stephen on that account: I mean, partly because she was lonesome, and partly because she saw his being there worried me. I suffered everything, that summer, in my mind. It was the old Weston days over again, only worse. It was so lonesome. I had no one to look to, nowhere to turn. It wouldn't have been so if Stephen had been all right. With him and my boys well, I would have asked for nothing more.

"Sunday was worst. I used to think I was a Christian then; but I didn't take all the comfort in my religion that I might have done; and Sunday was a long day. There was no meeting to go to. We had been too well brought up to think of working in the fields, as the Healys and others of the neighbours did; and the day was long—longer to Stephen than to me. I used to read and sing to him and the babies; and if we got through the day without his straying off to Healy's or some of the neighbours, I was happy. He might by chance come home sober on other nights, but on Sunday—never; and it was like death to me to see him go.

"Well, one Sunday afternoon Healy sent for him. Some folks had come from a settlement farther up the lake, and they wanted Stephen for some reason or other—I can't tell what, now—and me too, if I would come, the boy said who brought the message. But I wouldn't go, and did my best to keep Stephen at home, till he got vexed, and went away, at last, without a pleasant word.

"Oh! what a long day that was! The children played about very quietly by themselves, and I sat with my head upon my hands, thinking some, praying a little, and murmuring a great deal. I can shut my eyes now, and see myself sitting there so miserable, and the little boys playing about, so hushed and quiet. I can see the little green patch of vegetables, and the cornfield, and the roof of Healy's house beyond, and the blue smoke rising up so straight and still, and on the other side the prairie, and the gleam of the lake-water far away. I never hear the crickets on a summer afternoon but I think of that day, so bright and warm and still. Oh, how long it seemed to me!

"The children grew tired, and I put them to bed when I could keep them up no longer; and then I went and waited on the doorstep till I grew chilly and sick in the dew; and then I went in. I did not mean to go to sleep, though I sat down on the floor and laid my head on the pillow of my boys' low bed; but I was tired with the week's work, and more tired with the day's waiting, and I did drop off. I could not have slept very long. I woke in a fright from a dream I had, and the room was filled with smoke; and when I made my way to the door and opened it the flames burst out, and I saw my husband lying on the bed. He had come in, though I had not heard him. God alone knows how the fire happened. I don't know, and Stephen don't know, to this day.

"I tried my best to wake him; but I could not. What with liquor, and what with the smoke, he was stupefied. I dragged him out

and dashed water on him, and then went back for my boys. I don't know what happened then. I have a dream, sometimes, of holding a little body, and being held back when the blazing roof fell in; and then, they say, I went mad.

"I don't know how long the time was after that before I saw my husband. I have a remembrance of long nights, troubled by dreams of fire and the crying out of little children; and then of seeing kind faces about me, and of long, quiet days; and then they took me to my husband. He was ill, and cried out for me in his fever; and they took me to him, fearing for us both.

"He did not know me at first. I had been a young woman when we lived together on the prairie; but when I went back to him my hair was as white as it is to-day. He was changed too—oh, how changed and broken! He needed me, and I stayed and nursed him till he got well. I was weak in mind, and couldn't remember everything that had happened for a while; but I grew stronger, and it all came back; and then, oh, how I pitied him! There was no room in my heart for blame when I saw how he blamed himself; and we did the best we could to comfort one another.

"Then we said we'd begin again. We came away here to Canada, because we thought it was almost the end of the earth, and nobody would be likely to find us who had known us before.

"And here the Lord met us and cared for us and comforted us. And I'm not afraid now. Stephen's safe now in His keeping and His loving-kindness—oh, how good!"

The last words were uttered brokenly and with an effort, and Mrs Grattan leaned back in her chair pale and faint. Mrs Morely leaned over her, and her tears fell fast on the hands which she clasped in hers.

"It shakes me to go back to those old days," said Mrs Grattan, faintly. "You must let me lie down, so as I shall get over it before my husband comes along. It worries him dreadfully to see me bad. It won't last long. I shall be better soon."

She was but a little creature, thin and light, and, though Mrs Morely was not strong; she lifted her in her arms and laid her on the bed; and as the poor little woman covered her face and turned it to the wall, she sat down beside her to take the lesson of her story to herself. Surely the grace that had changed Stephen Grattan and given him rest from his enemy could avail for her husband too. "I will trust, and not be afraid!" she

murmured; and, with her hand clasping the hand of this woman who had suffered so much and was healed now, Mrs Morely had faith given her to touch the hem of the Great Healer's garment; and in the silence, broken only by the prayer-laden sighs of the two women, she seemed to hear a voice saying to her, "Go in peace."

There were no sorrowful faces waiting the coming of Stephen in the little log-house that night. The little lads met him with shouts of welcome halfway down the hill, and when he came into the house there was Sophy busy with her tea-cakes, and Mrs Morely sewing her never-failing white seam, and Dolly was dancing the baby on her lap, and singing a song which brought the prairie, and their home there, and the long summer Sabbaths to his mind, and a sudden shadow to his face. Mrs Morely's face showed that her heart was lightened.

"You look bright to-night, sister," said Stephen, greeting her in his quaint way; "have you heard good news?"

"I am waiting for good news," said Mrs Morely, with a quiver in her voice.

"They never wait in vain who wait for Him," said Stephen, looking a little wistfully from one to the other, as though he would fain hear more. But there was no time. Little Sophy's face was growing anxious; for her tea-cakes were in danger of being spoiled by the delay, and there was time to think of nothing else when they appeared.

"Have you had a good time, Dolly?" asked Stephen, as they went down the hill together in the moonlight, when the evening's frost had made the roads fit to walk on again.

"A good time, Stephen—a very good time," said Dolly, brightly. "I think that poor soul has renewed her strength; and, indeed I think so have I. Yes, dear, I've had a very good time to-day."

Chapter Eight.

John Morely's Friend.

In the meantime, John Morely was fighting his battle over again. He left the house of Stephen Grattan a humbled man, without strength, without courage, hardly daring to hope for

victory over a foe which he knew waited only for a solitary desponding hour to assail him. The dread and terror that fell upon him when he found himself homeless and friendless in the streets of Montreal cannot be told. Feeling deeply his own degradation, it seemed to him that even the chance eyes that rested on him as he passed by must see it too, and despise him; and he hurried on through the bitter cold, eager only to get out of sight.

He had not forgotten Stephen Grattan's letter; but he said to himself that it would be time enough to present it when he had found work and a settled place of abode. But now, weary in mind and in body, and nearly benumbed with the cold, when he found himself in the neighbourhood of the great hardware establishment in which Stephen's friend was employed, he determined to deliver it at once.

Stephen had prepared his friend Muir beforehand for Morely's coming. He had written to him how "the Lord had most surely given him this brand to pluck from the burning,—this poor soul to save from the roaring lion that goeth about seeking whom he may devour;" and, reading it, his friend never doubted that Stephen's words were the words of Stephen's Master; and from the moment that Morely stood before him, pale and weary, and shivering with the cold, he looked upon himself as indeed his brother's keeper.

Muir took him to his home that night; and when he saw how weak he was, how little able to struggle by himself against his enemy, he kept him there; for he knew all the dangers which might beset him in most of the places where he might be able to find a temporary home. From that time, for the next few months, all things were ordered there with reference to Morely. It was a poor place enough, for Muir's wages were not large; but it was neat and comfortable. His mother was his housekeeper,—a querulous old body, with feeble health, one who little needed any additional burden of household care. But when she knew that in a poor home, far away, a mother of little children was waiting, hoping and praying for the well-doing of this man whom her son had set his heart on helping, she did what she could to help him too. That is, she fretted a little at "her Sam" for thus thoughtlessly adding to her cares, and murmured a little when, giving up his own room to Morely, he betook himself to the garret; but all the same she was putting herself about, and doing her best to make the stranger feel at home with them. None knew better than she how much help was needed; for thirty of the threescore years she had lived had

been made anxious, and many of them wretched, by the same enslaving power that had its grasp on Morely. Her husband had lived a drunkard's life; and that he had not died a drunkard's death was owing to the fact that excess had left him helpless and bedridden for years, a burden on his wife and son. To save another woman from the misery of such a life as hers had been, was a good work to help in; and she gave herself to it, in her weak, complaining way, as entirely and as successfully as did her son.

As for Sam, many things united to make this labour of love not a light one to him. He looked upon himself as a rising man, as indeed he was, in a small way. He had entered the employment of the great firm of Steel and Ironside as errand-boy, and had gradually risen to occupy a situation of trust. Topham, the head clerk, kept the key of the safes where the books and papers of the firm were stored; but to him was entrusted the key of the great establishment itself; and there was no reason—at least, he saw none—why he might not one day stand in Topham's place. Nay, he might even be a partner: why not? The present chief of the firm had, long ago, been errand-boy in such an establishment; and it really did not seem to him to be presumptuous to suppose that, some time hence, he might be a merchant too, as well as Mr Steel.

By dint of constant and earnest attendance at evening schools, and no less constant and earnest efforts at home, he had learned a great deal that would help him in his career.

With all his good qualities of mind and heart, he was a little vain: nay, it may be said of him at this time of his life that he was very vain. His boyhood had lasted more years than boyhood generally does. Hard times, the force of circumstances, his father's evil life, had kept him down till lately; and he was now, at twenty-three, going through all the feverish little attacks with regard to dress and appearance, and other personal considerations, that sensible boys usually get over before they are eighteen. He liked to be seen walking with the clerks of the establishment, who considered themselves a step above him in the social ladder, and took pleasure in the success he had enjoyed of late in the frequent evening entertainments given among his friends.

Yet, in spite of this weakness, he was a true Christian, not in name, but in reality—one who knew himself to have been bought at an infinite price; and, knowing this, he realised something of the value of the poor soul whom he might help to save from the ruin that threatened him, and he knew himself to

be honoured in that he was permitted to do so great a work. But being, as has been said, vain and, in a small way, ambitious, it did come into his mind that to have such a man as this Morely living in his house—a man who could not be trusted to take care of himself, a man who in his best days was only, as he thought, a common workman, earning daily wages by the labour of his hand,—if did come into his mind that all this would not help him in his upward social way. To be seen in his company, to walk with him in the streets, to make the poor man's interests his own, to care for him and watch over him as he must do if he was really to help to save him, to win him to live a new life—might—indeed, must—place him in circumstances not to be desired—awkward and uncomfortable, as far as some of his friends were concerned. Being, as we said, a Christian, and having a sincere, true heart, he did not hesitate because of all this; but being vain, and in some things foolish, his labour of love, which could in no case have been light, was made all the heavier.

This was only a first experience. Afterwards all this went out of his mind, as if it had never been there. He gave himself to the work with a devotion that was worthy of the holy cause. What one man may do to save another, Samuel Muir did for John Morely. Holidays were rare and precious to him at this time; but he devoted more than one that fell to him in going here and there with him in search of work; and when work was found, he spoke of him to the employers and to the workmen in words that none but the utterly debased could hear in vain, entreating them that they would not make the work of reform more difficult to the poor broken man by placing temptation in his way. Many a morning and evening when he had little time or strength to spare from his own duties, he went far out of his way to see him past temptation, at times when he knew that the agony of desire was strong upon him, and that left to himself he must fall.

Many a pleasant invitation he refused at such times, rather than leave the poor homesick wretch to get through the long, dreary evening alone. Sometimes—not often, however—he beguiled him into some quiet pleasure-taking out of the house, to while away the time. Having given up his own room for the garret, he now gave up his garret—a matter of greater self-denial—to share his own room with Morely, that the garret might be made a place for evening work. He purchased, at the price of some self-denial in the way of outward adornment, a set of tools for the finer sort of cabinet-work; and in the long winter evenings

applied himself to learn to use them, that his friend might have something to do in teaching him.

It would take long to tell all the ways in which this young man carried on the labour of love he had undertaken. He watched over him, cared for him, denied himself on his account, bore alike with his petulance and his despondency, sheltered him from temptation from without, strengthened him to resist temptation from within—in short, laboured, as in God's sight, to turn this sinner from the error of his way, to lead him in faith to the blood of Christ, which cleanseth from all sin; knowing that he was thus "striving to save a soul from death, and to hide a multitude of sins."

Nor did he strive in vain. When months of temptation and struggle had passed, John Morely stood—not, perhaps, with his foe beneath his feet, but still on firm ground, a man who once more had confidence in himself, and in whom other men had confidence.

Chapter Nine.

Right at last.

The twenty-fourth of May came on Saturday that year. It was to be a double holiday to the children in the little log-house on the hill; for their father had written a letter to say that, if it could possibly be managed, he should pass it with them. It need not be told what joyful news this was to them all. It was not unmingled joy to them all, however. Sophy had some anxieties, which she did her best to hide; but they showed in the wistful watching of her mother's looks, and in her gentle efforts to chase all clouds from her face. As for Mrs Morely, she had suffered so many disappointments that she hardly dared to hope now. And yet her hopes were stronger than her fears this time, and she and her little daughter helped and encouraged one another without ever speaking a word.

The father was to come in the night-train of Friday, and go away in the night-train again, so that he might have two whole days at least at home; and early as the sun rises on the twenty-fourth of May, the little Morelys were up before him. The father came early, but not too early for the expectant children. The little lads met him far down the hill. They would have gone all the way to Littleton, only the bridge had been carried away by

the sudden rise of the river when the ice broke up, and the mother would not trust so many of them to go over in the ferry-boat. Sophy waited at the garden-gate, with the baby in her arms, and her mother sat on the doorstep, pale and trembling, till the voices drew near and they all came in sight.

“Clothed, and in his right mind,” she murmured, as her husband came with Will on his shoulder and little Harry in his arms,—oh! so different from him whose going away she had watched with such misgivings! It was the husband of her youth come back to her again; and she had much ado to keep back a great flood of joyful tears as she welcomed him home. As for Sophy, she never thought of keeping back her tears—she could not if she had tried ever so much—but clung sobbing to her father’s neck in a way that startled him not a little.

“What is it, Sophy? Are you not glad to see me?” he asked, after a time, when she grew quiet.

“Oh, yes; she’s glad,” said Johnny. “That is her way of showing that she’s glad. Don’t you mind, mother, how she cried that day when Mr Grattan brought the things, just after father went away?”

“She cried then because she was hungry,” said the matter-of-fact Eddy.

Sophy laughed, and kissed her father over and over again. Morely looked at his wife. There was something to be told, but not now. That must wait.

Nor can all the pleasure of that day be told. The little log-house was like a palace in the eyes of Morely. Indeed, it would have been very nice in any one’s eyes. The beds had been moved into the inner room, now that no fire was needed; and the large room, which was parlour and kitchen all in one, was as neat and clean as it could be made. It was bright, too, with flowers and evergreens and branches of cherry-blossom; and there were many comfortable and pretty things in it that Morely had never seen there before.

They did not stay much in the house, however. Mr and Mrs Grattan came up in the afternoon, and with them one whom John Morely presented to his wife as the best friend she had in the world, after Grattan and his wife—his friend Samuel Muir. Knowing a little of what he had been to her husband all these months past, Mrs Morely welcomed him with smiles—and tears, too—and many a silent blessing: and if he had been the head of

the firm—Steel and Ironside in one—he could not have been a more honoured guest.

They sat out on the hill during most of the afternoon. The day was perfect. It was warm in the sun, but cool in the shadow of the evergreens. The maples and elms did not throw deep shadows yet, and the air was sweet and fresh and still.

It was a very happy day to them all. To Samuel Muir it was a day never to be forgotten. Montreal is not a very great city. An hour's walk from the heart of it, in any direction, will bring one either to the river or to fields where wild flowers grow. But his life had been town life—and a very busy one; and to sit in the mild air, amid the sweet sounds and sweeter silence of the spring time, among all these happy children, was something wonderful to him. His constant anxious care for Morely all the winter had done much to make a man of him. His little weaknesses and vanities had fallen from him in the midst of his real work; and seeing the happy mother and her children, his heart filled with humble thankfulness to God, who had permitted him to help the husband and father to stand against his enemy.

As for Stephen Grattan, the sight of his face was good that day. He did not say much, but sat looking out over the river, and the village, and the hills beyond, as though he was not seeing *them*, but something infinitely fairer. Now and then, as he gazed, his thoughts overflowed in words not his own: "As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about His people." "Ask and receive, that your joy may be full." And sometimes he sang Dolly's favourite chorus, repeating in queer, old, trembling strains,—

"His loving-kindness, oh, how good!"

But he said little besides. Even Dolly spoke more than he that day, and with great pains drew out John Morely to tell how his prospects were brightening, and how since the first of May he had been foreman among his fellow-workmen, and how if things went moderately well with him he should have a better home than the little log-house for his wife and children before many months were over.

"Not just yet, however," he said, looking with pleased eyes at the brown, healthy faces of the little lads. "No place I could put them in could make up to them for these open fields and this pure air. I think, Alice, they will be better here for a time."

As for Alice, it did not seem to her that there was anything left for her to desire. Her heart was rejoicing over her husband with more than bridal joy,—her husband who had been “lost, and was found.” On this first day of his coming home she suffered no trembling to mingle with it. She would not distrust the love which had “set her foot upon a rock, and put a new song in her mouth.” “Mighty to save” should His name be to her and hers henceforth. The clouds might return again, but there were none in her sky to-day.

Things went well with the Morelys after this. How it all came about, cannot be told here; but when the grand cut-stone piers of the new bridge were completed, it was John Morely who built the bridge itself,—that is, he had the charge of building it, under the contractor to whom the work had been committed,—and it was built so quickly and so well that he never needed to go away from Littleton to seek employment again.

The little Morelys have come to think of the days before that pleasant May-time as of a troubled dream. The first fall of the snow-flakes brings a shadow to Sophy’s face still; but even Sophy has come to have only a vague belief in the troubles of that time. The little ones are never weary of hearing the story of that terrible winter storm: but Sophy never tells them—hardly acknowledges to herself, indeed—that there was something in those days harder to bear than hunger, or cold, or even the dread of the drifting snow.

If after that first bright day of her husband’s home-coming there mingled trembling with the joy of Mrs Morely, she is at rest now. Day by day, as the years have passed on, she has come to know that with him, as well as with herself, “Old things have passed away, and all things have become new;” and, in the blessed renewal of strength assured to those who wait upon the Lord, she knows that he is safe for evermore.

As for Stephen Grattan, he has had a good many years of hard work since then, making strong, serviceable boots and shoes, and serving the Lord in other ways besides. He is ungrammatical still, and queer, and some people smile at him, and pretend to think lightly of him, even when he is most in earnest,—people who, in point of moral worth or heavenly power, are not worthy to tie his shoes. But many a “tempted poor soul” in Littleton and elsewhere has his feet upon a rock and a new song in his mouth because of Stephen’s labours in his behalf; and if ever a man had the apostle’s prayer for the

Ephesians answered in his experience, he has; for he is “strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might.”

He is an old man now, whose “work of faith and labour of love” is almost over; and I never see him coming up the street, with his leather apron on, a little bowed and tottering, but always cheerful and bright, but I seem to hear the welcome, which cannot be very far before him now,—“Well done, good and faithful servant! Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.”
